

Inter Pares

Highlights 2010

In 2010, Inter Pares contributed more than \$3.9 million in financial support, as well as political and organizational assistance to our counterparts in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Canada. The following are highlights of some of these activities. For more information, photos and videos, visit www.interpares.ca.



CAROLINE BOURDREAU

Staff from the Gender Centre participate in activities to strengthen women's rights in Sudan.

The small West African country of Guinea-Bissau is a biological and cultural marvel and home to Inter Pares' counterpart **Tiniguena**. Despite last year's political upheavals, Tiniguena continued to organize exchanges among rural and urban youth and sponsor discussions on building peace in times

Africa

of instability and violence. Through community radio, the young women and men at Tiniguena organized debates on biodiversity, landgrabs, agrofuels, and the participation of girls in youth organizations. As the effects of the food crisis persist, Tiniguena has continued its work in reclaiming and multiplying lost varieties of agricultural seeds. This year, four varieties of rice were saved from extinction and given to farmers and seed-savers to multiply and share with other farmers. By planting local seed varieties, farmers are helping to rebuild a resilient local agricultural system that will feed the people of the country.

In April 2010, Sudan held the first national elections in 24 years. Many women candidates ran in the election but faced multiple challenges, including

a lack of financial resources, limited media access, and patriarchal attitudes within their own political parties. While all political parties agreed to a 25 per cent quota of women candidates, women were listed on separate ballots and little importance was given to this "women's list." With the support of Sudanese civil society organizations such as the **Gender Centre for Research and Training** and the **Salmamah Women's Resource Centre**, women candidates set aside their differences and jointly promoted the women's list. Women now occupy 112 of the 450 seats in Parliament. Despite a seriously flawed election, those who supported women candidates are hoping that their victory will make a difference for all the women of Sudan.



JEAN SYMES

Woman lighting candles at a PCS Mental Health Seminar.

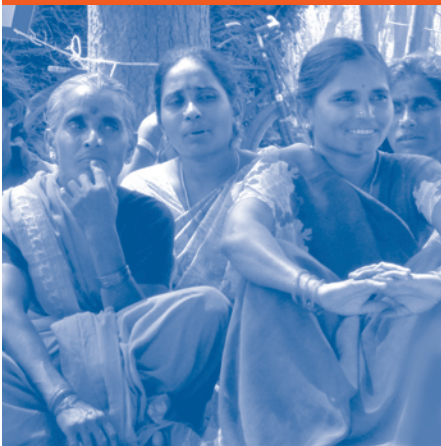
In El Salvador, violence against women remains widespread. In July 2010, the **Colectivo Feminista de Desarrollo Local** (Feminist Collective for Local Development) organized the first ever March Against Impunity and Violence Against Women. The march commemorated the murder of Elda Ramos, a well-known women's rights activist killed by her partner, and drew almost two thousand women from across the country into the streets of San Salvador. The women protested the inaction of the

Latin America

state and the judicial system to investigate and prosecute cases of violence against women, and the government's unwillingness to take substantial steps towards promoting women's equality. The march ended at the Ministry of Justice and Public Security where a delegation of women from the Colectivo and other organizations demanded, and received, a meeting with the Minister. The march brought together a diversity of women who found healing and inspiration in their collective struggles for justice – honouring the lives and dreams of women, like Elda Ramos, whose lives have been lost.

Huancavelica, located high in the Andes, was one of the regions most affected by the violent conflict in Peru. In August 2010, the survivors of the armed conflict celebrated the official opening of the *Casa de la Memoria de Huancavelica*, an exhibit created to remember the crimes committed against civilians. The documents and photos on display tell

the story from the perspective of the survivors. The *Casa*, located in the municipal library, was created through the collaboration of the **Project Counselling Service** (PCS) and the **Association of Families of People Disappeared of Huancavelica**. These organizations convinced the local government to donate a space for the *Casa* as a public demonstration of its support for the grassroots victims' movement. The *Casa* is the first commemorative site in Peru developed jointly by government authorities, the grassroots victims' movement and civil society organizations. It is a contribution to the historical memory of the Peruvian people and a tribute to the efforts of the victims' movement to build a peaceful and democratic society. A short video on the opening of the *Casa* can be viewed at: www.interpares.ca/en/publications/multimedia/MuseumofMemory.php



DAVID BRULER

Women in Bangladesh participate in a Nijera Kori local self-help group.

In Bangladesh, **Nijera Kori** supports the rural poor to defend their rights. More than 274,000 women and men have become members of local self-help groups. During 2010, group members put \$223,000 into joint savings and invested more than \$100,000 in economic activities that created jobs and income

Asia

for members. Nijera Kori trained these groups to use political and judicial means to gain access to public land and water resources that are crucial for rural livelihoods. This year, members recovered more than 5,000 acres of land that had been illegally taken by wealthy elites. Members also established and managed community schools and encouraged school participation, especially by girls. As a result, enrollment this year increased by 2,393 children, more than half of whom are girls.

Since the early 1990s, Inter Pares has been working with refugees who have fled the conflict in Burma and have sought asylum in neighbouring countries including Malaysia. As Malaysia is not a signatory to the UN refugee convention, refugees are criminalized and subject to

arrest, detention and deportation. Inter Pares has been working with some of the 80,000 Burmese refugees in Malaysia, supporting their efforts to organize for mutual protection and engaging local organizations to assist these vulnerable people. In 2010, Inter Pares provided financial assistance and organizational support to **Tenaganita**, a leading Malaysian human rights organization, to provide legal aid, help communities develop informal schools for children, and assist refugees in gaining access to local health services. Tenaganita will advocate with the Malaysian government to put an end to the abuse and extortion that refugees frequently experience at the hands of police and immigration officials.



CBAN

Lucy Sharratt, Coordinator of the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network.

For many years, the United Nations has been documenting the horrific human rights abuses in Burma. In March, the UN Special Rapporteur on Burma called for a UN Commission of Inquiry to assess whether these human rights abuses constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. Throughout 2010, **Canadian Friends of Burma** (CFOB) engaged the Canadian government and mounted a campaign on the need for international support for such an inquiry. Within the first week of the campaign, over 3,000 people had sent emails to the Canadian government supporting the call. CFOB also convinced eighty Canadian parliamentarians and senators to sign a statement calling for an inquiry. On September 2nd, the Government of Canada officially announced its support for the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry, thus

Canada

putting more international pressure on the call for an investigation into human rights abuses in Burma.

In 2009, Canadian flax exports to Europe were found to be contaminated with genetically modified (GM) flax, which has never been approved in Canada. As a result, Canadian flax farmers lost access to the \$300 million European market (representing 70 per cent of Canada's flax exports). The disaster also required clean-up and testing costs, an expense that farmers had to bear. In 2010, agribusiness giant Monsanto announced plans to develop genetically modified wheat and alfalfa. The latest GM initiative awaiting government approval is transgenic pork and salmon. Many Canadians are opposed to this type of food production, and increasing numbers of people are involved in the local food movement emphasizing ecological production methods and the development of local markets for farmers. This year, Inter Pares worked with the **Canadian Biotechnology Action Network** (CBAN) to raise serious questions about the introduction of new GM crops and animals, and the impact on human health and the environment. Inter Pares is also actively involved in the **People's Food Policy Project**, a pan-Canadian conversation about the need for

fundamental change in Canada's food system. Find out more: www.cban.ca and www.peoplesfoodpolicy.ca.

MiningWatch Canada works to protect people and the environment from the negative impacts of mining, and advocates regulatory changes to prevent further damage. In 2006, MiningWatch became alarmed that the Federal government departments assessing the proposed Red Chris mine in British Columbia eliminated the need for public consultations required by Canada's Environmental Assessment Act (CEAA). Although the mine would affect the three greatest salmon rivers in B.C. and convert a pristine lake into a waste dump, the government failed to consult First Nations people whose traditional hunting and fishing grounds would be destroyed. After attempts to get the government to obey the law, MiningWatch took the government to court. The case was appealed all the way to the Supreme Court. In January 2010, the Supreme Court ruled that the Federal government had acted unlawfully in its evaluation of the proposed massive open-pit mine. With environmental regulations increasingly jeopardized, MiningWatch is leading efforts to prevent weakening the CEAA in the upcoming Parliamentary review of the Act.

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